

KASTLE: Criminal Minds

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Summary: KASTLE: Criminal Minds is the desperate tale of a irascible, young UNSC Marine. Through his time in the military, he stumbles upon many hardships, some of which are the reminiscents of his frightening history. Follow along with the Marines life as he endu

1. Prolouge

****Prologue:****

Antonio Castillo was treating his soldier's wounds when he heard noises rustling toward him. He injected a little morphine into his man's leg, praying for a miracle, but was rewarded with the cold silence of nothingness. The blood was gushing out of the man's wound like a broken faucet. Castillo's combat fatigues were already drenched in sweat and dark red blood. He wiped the blood on his pants, leaving a long red smear. The rustling was getting louder. Castillo was going to have to leave. He leaned on his Battle Rifle and used his remaining strength to push him up. His knees cracked from the long period of being idle. Castillo could feel his left leg chafed and raw. It burned like hell, but he knew facing the wrath of a plasma burn would be even worse. He shivered as his right leg awoke from its long "sleep". Paying one last debt to his man, he turned and left the high grass he had been hiding in. Carrying nothing but his light gear, ammunition, and his Battle Rifle, Castillo ran for the safe protection of the nearby trees. The battlefield was seemed so quiet and tranquil. Yet, it was all so deceiving. Behind the shroud of silence was nothing but death and terror. Castillo's thoughts drifted back to his fallen comrade as he ran for the high trees. His man's death had been quick and painless, like a switch had been turned off. It angered Castillo deeply; many things angered him nowadays. That man had been one of his extreme followers. Castillo stopped near a thick tree trunk and squatted down, mourning for his fallen soldier.

Gloria al Padre, y al Hijo, y al Espiritual Santo. Como era en el principio, ahora, y siempre por los siglos de los

siglosâ€|

â€|

Various gunshots rang out in front of him, shaking him out of his depressed state. Castillo shook his head, loosening out any kinks or ill thoughts that had accumulated over the past few hours. Human screams ripped through the fog like a sharp knife making Castillo instinctively shoulder his BR-55. He aimed his Battle Rifle toward the direction of the screams. Whatever had killed those humans was probably heading his way and no way was Castillo going down without a fight.

2. Chapter 1

****Chapter 1:****

Antonio Castillo was a 36-year-old Latino. After dropping out of college, he had taken the tedious and dangerous job of a drug dealer. He had gotten bored of running from the law and decided to join the Marines. However, they had rejected him because of his bad moral character and background. Castillo left his hometown and joined the Underground, a haven for criminals of all kind. He was arrested as soon as he joined and had served an overbearing 5-year term in prison.

In Castillo's last few months in prison, the state governor had offered him, along with a few other prisoners, a pardon. They had eagerly taken it, desperate to get out of their rotten penitentiary. However, there was a kink in the deal. Castillo and his prison mates had to serve in the UNSC Marines. Castillo had been infuriated when he had learned of the contract. He had always despised the Army and everything associated with it. But his prison mates had talked him into it. Reluctantly, Castillo and his men signed up for the Marines. After two long and hardcore years of training, he and his men were ready to head into battle. They had all been assigned to the same squad, given the nickname of The Desperados. Together, they eagerly climbed the ranks. Castillo had gone from Private to Gunnery Sergeant in a little less than two years. Their squad nickname had gone from The Desperados to the honorary name of Team Foxtrot. They had won battles easily with little casualties. Their time in the Marines had been going steeply uphill.

Gunnery Sergeant Castillo checked his ammo and sighed. His battle rifle was empty. As he rammed home a new clip, his mind flicked back to that day, so long ago...

He had been outside the house playing on the houses' driveway when he became aware of a soft sobbing. Looking around, he saw through the glass window of the door his aunt leaning against the wall, clutching the phone, tears running down her face. He got up; walking towards her to find out what had happened to make his aunt, the one person he knew who had never shown weakness, to collapse in this state. As he stood in the doorway, his aunt looked up and saw him. She looked away and wiped the soft tears off her rosy cheeks. Beckoning him closer, she said in a hoarse voice

"I have something I need to tell you. It's about your parents..."

His parents had been in the Spartan-I program, a project that had led up to the development of the Spartan-IIs. It angered Castillo deeply. His parents had been "test subjects", nothing but a group of people who were injected with substances and later disposed of. And for what, for what was all their pain worth?

Fuck the UNSC. They were the ones who took his parents from him to make the super soldier, these so-called Spartan-IIs. And now where were those Spartans? Why was he here, fighting a losing battle when thousands of young men and women had given up their lives for a cause that was supposed to mean that they wouldn't be fighting this stupid war? He shook his head. Lining up his sights, he let off a burst of bullets. The projectiles smashed into the flesh of the alien bastard and poured out blood in small fountains. The alien's arms flailed as its muscles stiffened. The body finally slackened as it limply hit the floor. He looked around, cursing again. The past was gone, but he could still live for the future...

"Sun! I want you concentrating fire behind the ST, damnit. They're the real threat. Berkley, I want you up that hill. Snipe in on the higher-ranking bastards. Rocket Jockeys, fire at the turrets. They've got Company C pinned down over by Grid 135 N by 915 W. It'll gain us some serious leeway. Rest of Team Foxtrot's with me; we're taking back that bunker."

Team Foxtrot had been fighting in the streets for over 10 hours now, but there was no time for respite. Though they were safely behind cover, they were stuck and running dangerously low on ammunition. His team and a few other companies had been trying to take over some stolen Covenant estate. When they had learned of the alien race trying to take over one of the outlying colonies they had quickly rushed to Corrylium IV, a beautiful and oxygen-rich planet. Their cruiser, the Chubbuck, had barely gotten to Corrylium IV on time. When they arrived, they were rewarded with the overbearing task of taking back a human bunker.

Corrylium IV was a beautiful planet. Certain sections of the planet had remained untouched over the years. They were abundant with natural resources, trees, and lakes. Corrylium IV had been an entire oasis. However, for every positive there is a negative. The industrial and military sections of the planet were pure hell. The air was polluted to the extent of ozone destruction. Sunny days were shrouded with a thick layer of grime and dust. Streets were littered with trash and soot. The buildings were so high, they seemed to go straight into the skies. The humans had ruined most of the planet. Where natural beauty once was, was now a land of machines and malice. Corrylium IV had been abundant with people until a few days before. When the citizens had learned of the Covenant attack, they had all evacuated and ran. The loss of this planet had been a major blow to the human economy. Corrylium IV's exports were a big part of Earth's intake. Without their materials, Earth would be chaos. It would add up to be another Great Depression.

"Castillo! You're going to have to take care of something else first. I've spotted multiple contacts on my scope. From the amount of dust they're raising, I can only assume it's an old cavalry charge of about 20 or so Ghosts."

"Damnit! Acknowledged Garrison. 10-34 the last message. Order

Companies B and C to take back the bunker. We're not losing it to those Covenant bastards!"

"Understood."

"Order the pickets to pull back, tell Company A to pick up position at 139 N by 928 W. They'll be flanking the Ghosts when they come in. I don't want them firing until they have my mark. I want the Ghosts trapped; they're only truly effective when they have their maneuvering space. Company D will be groundside at our position. They'll have assaulters firing from the allies, rockets and snipers on top the small buildings. Shotguns guard the doorways to keep alien bastards from sneaking in. Rockets fire at the concentrations, snipers fire at the ranking officials. We make the most out of what we have available. Nobody fires until my mark."

"Relaying orders, sir."

Garrison was the team's AI, or Artificial Intelligence. He was designed for only a few purposes, in this case, reconnaissance, quick decision-making, and battle history. The AI knew what the Corporal was planning. Castillo was an avid decision maker, outsmarted only by ONI sections and AIs. So, when Garrison figured out what Castillo was planning, he almost "choked." What the gunnery sergeant was planning was way too risky. He was risking an entire company for a few Ghosts. What Castillo was planning was ludicrous, but Garrison could only "sit down, buckle up, and cross his fingers for the best." It was going to be a long, frustrating night.

The Ghosts flooded over the rise like a giant purple, blue tidal wave. Their glistening alloy played hell with the snipers scopes. The air was deadly silent except for the rumbling of the attack and reconnaissance vehicles. No soldiers yelled, no guns were fired; no beings were hurt—yet. However, there were way more Covenant vehicles than what Garrison had expected, with a total count of about 42.

"Garrison, damnit, we got about 42 Covenant Ghosts and a few files of Covenant aliens coming our way. Alert all other squad commanders."

"Already done. Company C has set up position on 139 N by 928 W. They are awaiting your mark. "

"Understood, Garrison. Order all the launchers to fire in shifts."

If the human rocket launchers had a weakness, it was that they could only fire two shots before reloading. Castillo knew this as a fact; it had cost him many loyal men. To counter the handicap, he had ordered the launchers to fire in shifts. This reduced the time between shots and ensured a constant rate of fire. Reloading was another mishap; it just took too much time. But that was a kink Castillo would have to overcome another day.

"Understood. I'm sending a request for reinforc—"

"Fire!"

Waves of armor-piercing bullets whistled through the sky, spraying

the aliens with sheets of burning lead from all directions. The alien machines wobbled as they hit barriers of projectiles. The Ghosts staggered and exploded, showering nearby aliens with fiery alloy. Rockets whooshed out of their barrels, destroying more than 3 or 4 of the vehicles at a time. The steady "_Crack. Crack. Crack." _of sniper rifles resonated throughout the city. Aliens dropped like flies. Covenant flew everywhere, occasionally even killing their comrades.

Covenant numbers had dwindled extremely, but there were still more attack vehicles operable. The Ghosts sprayed the humans with stinging plasma fire in return. Marines began to fall. The mechanized army began to form a strategy. They began to hover in circles, reducing the amount of crashes and increasing the amount of kills. The Covenant aliens maintained a constant stream of plasma, burning humans and occasionally aliens alike, eager for their kill. The launchers were dangerously low on ammunition. The snipers were having trouble keeping up with the speed of the Ghosts. The assaulters were being overrun. Both sides battled back and forth, suffering substantial casualties. The human army wouldn't last long, and they all knew it.

"Damn! Garrison, where are those reinforcements?"

"On their way. They're facing trouble up there too."

Castillo took his gaze away from the fighting and stared up, glad to see that more UNSC vessels had arrived. He barely made out the outline of both human and alien ships. One human ship exploded, making him flinch. The nearby scream of one of his men brought him back to reality.

"Jesus Christ! Castillo! I'm hit!"

"Man down! Man down!"

"Medic! We need a medic! Garrison, where's Ryan?"

"Here, sir!"

"Ryan, get Sun patched up as well as you can! Bring him up to the landing pad when you're done. When reinforcements come, order them to take him back up."

"Yes, sir!"

The fighting continued on for what seemed like hours. Castillo peered into his NavScope and barely made out the figures of more Covenant soldiers. There were entire files of Grunts, Jackals, and Elites. It was a nightmare. They had even brought tanks and air support with them. The tanks lobbed mortars of superheated plasma toward the human's position. Their mortar shots were so graceful. They floated up into the sky and gently raced back toward the earth. They seemed like they were dancing ballet, being were so elegant. Yet, behind that beautiful ball of plasma was power that could tear any human in half.

"Oh God! Oh God! Help me! I don't want to die! Help me!"

The wailing of one of his soldiers made him jump back.

"Shit! Michaels! What's happened? Are you alright?"

"Hell no, sir!"

"Ryan! We gotta another man down! It's Michaels. Get over there!"

"On my way."

Castillo ran from his position, desperately looking for Michaels. He found him safely behind a dumpster, with half his body missing. The mortar shot had tore right through him, leaving nothing but a scarred and frightened soldier.

"Oh dear God! This is fucking BULLSHIT!"

Now, Castillo was clearly pissed off. He ripped the MedPak from the frozen figure of Ryan.

"Damnit, Ryan. Don't just fucking stand there. Give me a goddamn hand! Get his hips patched up. Clog it up with some bio-foam! I don't care what you do. Save this man from dying!"

Castillo heaved on his chest, trying to keep him from dying. He knew Michaels was going to die, but then again, miracles always happened to good people. The static of his combat chatter surprised him. He wiped his bloody hands on his combat fatigues, leaving a dark, red smear.

"Shit!"

The battle was going downhill, and if the reinforcements didn't come soon, they would all be in a very tight position.

"This is Williams to all remaining UNSC personnel, does anybody read me."

"Affirmative Williams, this is Castillo. Give me some good news."

"Castillo, sir, we've taken back our estate with an estimated KIA of about 50 men."

"Acknowledged. Switching to main frequency."

"This is Castillo to Team C, guard the bunker at all costs, and sweep the area clear of all hostiles. We don't want any more surprises sneaking up on us. Team B report over to our position. The coordinates are 134 N by 939 W. We could use some help over here."

"10-40, Foxtrot. This is Team B, we're on our way."

Castillo jammed his chatter back into his side pack. He checked Michael's vitals, only to find that they had stopped.

"Shit! Ryan, we're heading over to 134 N by 939 W. Stay alert. Be prepared for anything."

"Garrison. Relay to the commanding UNSC vessel. 10-2. More Medivacs are required. Give me an audio link now!"

"On itâ€|Castillo, you're on."

"This is Team Foxtrot. We need a 10-2 ASAP. We've got a definite 10-26 down here. Where are the reinforcements we requested?"

"Foxtrot, reinforcements are on their way. Please remain patient. We have a 10-23 up here. Stand By."

"God damn it! Where are the fucking reinforcements?"

"Foxtrot, your mike is hot. This is the Aquinas, signing off."

Castillo heard the link close and was filled with rage.

"Fuck yeah, my mike is hot. I don't give a shit! Just give us the fucking reinforcements!"

The fight continued on. All hope seemed gone for the humans. Marines were abandoning strategy and breaking formation. The infantry square was all but demolished. Humans were running from the battle, putting their own lives before the lives of many. Marines dropped like flies. The battleground was drenched in human and alien blood alike. The humans were hopeless.

The overhead rumbling of machine gun fire shook Castillo out of his mental state. The sound was too welcome. The remaining Marines jumped up and waved, celebrating the newfound encouragement. Castillo ordered the men to concentrate on the fighting and took a second to look up. All he spotted was one lone Pelican.

"Christ! These aren't reinforcements, this is a fucking burial detail!"

The Pelican landed, throwing up a plume of dust. Castillo shielded his eyes and tried looking through the grime. He barely made out the outline of a squad of soldiers. They looked exactly like the creatures they were fighting now. Yet, they still seemed vaguely human. Castillo's sore arms tried reaching for his Battle Rifle, but it was too heavy. He could feel the fight draining out of him. Was it really over? Had the Covenant won the battle in space, also? Would the Covenant soon win the ground battle?

The leader stood over two meters tall and seemed like it could break through ten meters of solid rock. The soldier's armor was a strange shade of green with black matte underneath. They reminded Castillo so much like the robots he had seen in movies when he was young. The one in the lead jumped off the Pelican first, walking forward. His motions were so fast and precise. Every step went where it was supposed to, not even a centimeter off. Castillo was awestruck. When the dust finally settled, he stared into the new soldiers faceplate. He read his dog tag and a wave of anguish washed over him. Castillo barely made out the words,

"Spartan II."

3. Chapter 2

****Chapter 2:****

"Christ, this sure beats fighting down in hell, doesn't it?"

"Yeah! Course it does, man."

Team Foxtrot had been evacuated from the battle ground as soon as the Spartans had arrived. Judging from the reports, things were going pretty well down on Corrylium IV. The anger in Castillo had died, leaving him feeling excellent in one of the best UNSC ships available. He was surrounded by 10 inches of honeycombed Titanium-A armor. Their ship, the Aquinas, was armed to the teeth with 2 MAC cannons, over 200 archer-missile pods, and 5 HAVOC tactical nukes. Nothing could get past the Aquinas. Though he had only been onboard for 20 minutes, Castillo had already found an empty room, unpacked, and taken a short shower. The shower had been a blessing. All the grime and blood that had accumulated over the days had finally been washed off. He could almost envision himself shining. He quickly dressed and was about to take a nap when a Private stuck his head into his Castillo's room. The gunnery sergeant yelped and jumped back, his face turning bright red. He held back the want scold the boy, feeling it improper and unnecessary.

"Sir, so sorry, sir. The captain wants to meet you on deck."

The green soldier was trying his hardest to stifle a laugh.

"Understood, Private. But, don't let it happen again."

The Private nodded and left, gently closing the door behind him. Castillo sighed; he had been just like the young soldier. He had been so ambitious and adventurous in his young days that he had forgotten most of the rules. Now, he was just another battle-hardened warhead. It surprised Castillo how much he had changed during his time in the Marines. He was learning everything so fast, yet so well. He learned things most people never learned and could experience things many people never could dream of. It was his job, and he loved it. Yet, there seemed to be something else underneath him. Something so greedy and ravenous that it drove him almost crazy.

Was it money? Or power? Maybe it was fame. No. It was something else entirely, yet Castillo couldn't place his hand on it. It was like running after something that you didn't really want. But, the further you ran, the more you couldn't stop. His head hurt from thinking too hard.

"Christ, I just came out of hell! Why am I thinking like this? Antonio! Relax. Go see the captain, don't keep him waiting."

Castillo dressed up in uniform and looked at his mirror, straightening out all the wrinkles. He sighed deeply, staring at himself. Castillo walked out the door and headed for the bridge, finally finding time to just walk and think in peace. He longed deeply for the warm comfort of his aunt, Kristina. His time living with Aunt Kristina seemed so far away, like a different life. Yet, he

had only been away for a few years. Things had changed so much, so fast. Life reminded Castillo of roller coasters, which had been popular centuries before he was born. He was on one right now, one so fast and dangerous that it kicked people off the ride without warning. He was on one that never stopped.

The Aquinas' hallways were so alike and confusing. They were all made of the same dull, gray metal. Occasionally, they were decorated with tiny, foggy windows. Castillo walked on, looking out the windows whenever he had a chance. Corrylium looked so beautiful from space. It reminded him so much of Earth. Thin wisps of white clouds drifted along, as though they were dancing to music. The water was pure blue, pacific and tranquil. The land was green, littered with occasional patches of brown and blue. Castillo immediately knew where they were; they were on the west side of the planet- the only part of the planet that had remained untouched.

As Castillo walked on, he finally began noticing he was walking in the wrong direction. He quickly retraced his footsteps and asked a crewman for directions to the bridge. He finally arrived at the deck, panting hard. He had been late for his scheduled appointment and keeping shipmasters waiting was not a good idea.

The captain glared at him, obviously frustrated with his tardiness. Castillo held back the excuse he had dreamed up and stood up straight, saluting the old man.

"Gunnery Sergeant Castillo, reporting as ordered, sir."

"Yes, thirty minutes late. I know."

Castillo was at a loss of words. He opened his mouth to apologize but couldn't bring himself to talk. What was it with this guy? His eyes seemed so weird. There wasn't anything wrong with them; it was just that something seemed to lurk in his eyes that made Castillo shiver inside. He brushed the thought aside and stood up straighter.

"Sorry, sir. It won't happen again."

"You make sure of that, understood Gun Sarge?"

"Yes, sir. Perfectly."

"Glad to hear it. At ease."

Castillo let out his breath and placed his feet further apart, placing himself in a comfortable position. Whatever the Captain was going to say was probably going to be bad news. He could see that whatever was in his eyes ran along the road of defeat. Something was very wrong.

"I would like to take the time to congratulate you on your amazing performance down on Corrylium IV. Know that your bravery and intelligent actions will not go rewarded. Now, as youâ€|"

Minutes passed by like hours. The Captain's voice was monotonous, boring Castillo to his wits.

"Corryliumâ€|environmentâ€|goodâ€|howeverâ€|Spartans..."

Hearing the mentioning of the Spartans, Castillo suddenly looked into the Captain's eyes. A little smile spread across the Captain's face. Did he know his past?

"It's alright, son. There ain't any reason to be afraid of those Spartans. They won't hurt you at all. We use them to kill the alien bastards, not fellow Marines. Anyway, as I was saying before, we're pulling the Spartans out. Look at the data tablet and you'll see things aren't going very well up here."

One of the technicians spoke up, as if attesting to his statements, "Sir! The drones have detected more Slip-space ruptures, heading in our direction. I estimate a total of maybe 30 Covenant cruisers. ETA is a little more than 30 minutes."

"Damnit. Acknowledged, Samson. Spurlock, connect us with the Spartans. They're pulling out sooner than we expected."

Spurlock was the ship's communications officer. She wore her hair Helljumper style, short on the sides and flat on the top. She had green eyes, a slightly flattened nose and full lips. She managed to have both a soldier's face and a woman's face at the same time.

"Yes, sir. You're on."

"This is Captain Mendel to Team Spartan. We're pulling you out now! Board your Pelicans and head back up to the Aquinas. We've got no time to lose."

The bridge fell quite except for the occasional typing and soft talking of onboard technicians. The captain waited, a bead of sweat trickling down his forehead. He wiped it off, hoping not to show weakness in a time of suspense, but Castillo had already seen it. The Captain glared at him, giving the message not to tell anybody else. Castillo merely nodded. The Spartans were taking too long to respond. What was going on down there? The reports had said they were green, but they could have been easily forged. The awkward silence continued on until the radio finally crackled, startling Castillo. The Captain smiled and stared back at Castillo. The Gunnery Sergeant stared at his feet and barely held in a chuckle.

"Sir! We're just getting started down here. The party's just begun!"

Castillo could hear automatic fire in the background. He barely made out the boom of a fragmentation grenade and the sizzling of plasma fire. The Spartans' voice was a squeak compared to the volume of his surroundings.

"Well, it's a different story up here. Pack up and leave Corrylium IV, Spartan-117. That's an order."

Castillo could almost hear the Spartan sighing. He understood how he felt. Soldiers were all alike. They all felt the same feelings, saw the same sights, and experienced the same experiences. They were meant to fight on the ground, not wait and sit in some spaceship. Most soldiers liked the feeling of real ground underneath their feet,

real oxygen circulating in their lungs, and real gravity pulling them down. But most of all, they liked the idea of taking control of their own life. On a ship, they weren't in control. Some captain, that they didn't even know, was commanding everybody, determining everything. However, down on the ground, it was a whole different story. They went where they wanted to go and did what they wanted to do. From the cockpits of ships and planes, the war was just a video game. Little people ran silently along the computer screens until, suddenly, they exploded in a flash of bright light. The reality on the ground was way messier. Real people replaced computer "dots". Bones and blood replaced pixels. Life in the cockpits was for the wannabes. The real fighters joined the Marines.

The Spartans voice crackled through the Captain's personal speaker.

"10-40, Captain. We're on our way."

The Captain turned toward Castillo, crossing his arms, looking just a little defeated. He slouched his shoulders just a little bit. Castillo couldn't help but speak up.

"Sir, permission to speak freely, sir?"

"Granted."

"Sir, I know what you're experiencing. I've felt what you feel right now except ten times worse. Don't let it get into your head, sir. What's done is done. The past is gone, but you can still live for the future, sir. Thank you."

"Well, I get your point and all. Thanks for the advice."

The captain stared hard at Castillo, trying to figure out his thoughts, but unexpectedly sighed.

"Yeah. Thanks againâ€¦| Spurlock! Have the Spartans boarded ship yet?"

"Yes, sir. They have just unpacked and are on their way up right now, sir."

"Good. Samson, give me the report on the Covenant bastards."

"Sir! They're ETA is 15 minutes. All other ships have been notified and are leaving the system, heading for Erasmus V as you requested."

"Perfect. I want everybody as far away as possible, understood? Ready the Slipspace engines."

Right after Captain Mendel had stopped talking, the bridge door hissed open. Castillo spun around and looked, in awe. One lone Spartan walked forward, an easy two meters tall. This was the same Spartan that had led the attack on Corrylium IV.

"Spartan-117, reporting as ordered, sir."

"Good. On time, too."

The Captain shot Castillo a small grin and quickly stowed it, putting on his business face once again. Castillo stared at the Spartan. He was just as alien as the Covenant. The anger that had filled up in him was gone. Castillo dug deeper into his mind to find the hatred that had so easily popped up down on the planet, but still couldn't find it. He gave up and concentrated on the conversation.

"Spartan-117? I'm Gunnery Sergeant Castillo. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Pleasure's mine."

The mechanized soldier held out his hand, but Castillo didn't take it. A simple squeeze could leave Castillo's hand injured for weeks. The Captain stared at the two, trying to figure out their feelings, but gave up. He couldn't stand the awkward silence any longer and spoke up.

"Iâ€¦uhâ€¦I thought you soldiers might want to see what happens whenâ€¦uhâ€¦you knowâ€¦the glassing. Youâ€¦uhâ€¦. you definitely deserve it."

Castillo couldn't believe what he was hearing and immediately took the chance. He had been dreaming of seeing the spectacle for years.

"Yes, sir. Definitely, sir."

The Spartan merely nodded.

"Slipspace ruptures detected! They're behind us. Switching to aft cameras, now!"

"Understood, Samson. Flynn, how are those Slipspace engines? I want us out of here as soon as I say so. Not even a second off. 10-40?"

"10-40, sir. Slipspace engines are charged at 100 percent and awaiting your mark."

"Perfect. Remember this moment, ladies and gentlemen. Because this is what we fight for."

More than twenty Covenant ships winked into view. From the far distance, they looked like big white stars, standing out perfectly in the dark black space. They reminded Castillo so much like sharks, swimming dangerously throughout the dark, murky water. The Gunnery Sergeant watched as the Covenant cannons brightened, shooting out fiery beams of overheated plasma. Wave after wave of plasma hit the planet's surface. The planet's lakes, rivers, and oceans vaporized in a matter of minutes. In a few more hours, there would be no more breathable atmosphere. Fields and forests were glassy smooth and glowing red-hot patches. Where there had once been an oasis, was now nothing but hell.

Castillo watched on, occasionally casting a suspicious glance at the Spartan. The Spartan hadn't moved a single muscle, but Castillo could tell that the super-soldier was furious. His back was slumped and his hands were clenched in fists. Castillo looked back at the view of

what had once been Corrylium IV. It was murder! Millions of innocent people killed for the sole reason that a few Covenant bastards didn't like humans. This bullshit is what made Castillo mad. Not because they looked like shit or because they glassed beautiful planets, but because they killed civilians that couldn't defend themselves. This was exactly what the UNSC had done to his parents. Castillo couldn't watch any longer.

"Sir, requesting permission to leave deck."

"Granted."

As Castillo walked away, he could feel the Captains eyes staring back at him. Whatever was in those eyes wasn't right. Castillo would have to figure it out. As Castillo walked on toward his room, he noticed that not many crewmembers were awake. The hallways were deathly silent, except for the quiet humming of machinery. He walked on, sighing and looking out the windows with a sense of dread. What was it that was wrong? He didn't feel right. Nothing felt right. Something was not in its place. Castillo found his room and unlocked it, walking in. He flipped on the light switch and slipped into his nightclothes. Lying in bed, Castillo looked up at his gray ceiling. He sighed again and turned on his side. He couldn't sleep. Outside this wall was nothing but a black vacuum. Castillo was frightened.

He closed his eyes and waited for sleep to take him away, but nothing happened. He could feel the Aquinas slowly gaining speed. In a single burst of light, the Aquinas was more than a million miles away from Corrylium IV. Today's battle was over; tomorrow's was just beginning.

Castillo lied there for what seemed like hours, waiting for sleep. Finally, he turned on his desk lamp and went to the medicine cabinet. He got out Sleeptight, a drowsiness drug, and swallowed it down with water. Castillo went back and lay on the bed. He could already feel the pill taking effect. In his last few minutes of consciousness, the answer popped into his head. The Captains eyes had been filled with pain. The same kind of pain he had suffered himself, the pain of losing a loved one. It was the pain that you got when you served for the same people that had killed your parents. Castillo closed his eyes, promising to keep it a secret. He would see the Captain about it tomorrow.

The gunnery sergeant gently fell into a deep slumber. He was just one out of the many people aboard the Aquinas that would soon face turmoil.

End
file.